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NOR205 EPE255

1257 :DEATHS:

BONN, WEST GERMANY, OCT 19, (REUTERS) WEST GERMAN OFFICIALS TODAY PUZZLED OVER THE VIOLENT DEATHS OF THREE SENIOR MILITARY OFFICERS IN THE PAST 10 DAYS AS NEWSPAPERS CONTINUED TO SPECULATE THAT ESPIONAGE AND EVEN A MILITARY SPY RING MIGHT BE INVOLVED.

THE THIRD OFFICER, LT. COL. JOHANNES GRIMM, 54, SHOT HIMSELF IN HIS DEFENSE MINISTRY OFFICE YESTERDAY.

HE WAS SAID TO HAVE BEEN SUFFERING FROM A SERIOUS ILLNESS BUT PRESS REPORTS SATURDAY SAID MILITARY COUNTER-INTELLIGENCE INVESTIGATORS WERE CALLED IN. THE REPORTS COULD NOT BE CONFIRMED.

GRIMM'S SUICIDE FOLLOWED THAT OF DEPUTY COUNTER-INTELLIGENCE CHIEF GEN HORST WENDTLAND OCT 8, AND THE MYSTERIOUS SHOOTING DEATH OF FORMER NATO OFFICIAL REAR ADM. HERMANN LUEDKE ON THE SAME DAY.

A DEFENSE MINISTRY SPOKESMAN SAID THERE WAS NO REASON TO SUSPECT ANY BREACH OF REGULATIONS OR SECURITY WAS CONNECTED WITH THE DEATH OF GRIMM WHO HAD BEEN WITH THE MINISTRY SINCE 1963 AND WORKED IN THE LOGISTICS DIVISION.

BUT THE MYSTERY SURROUNDING LUEDKE'S DEATH DEEPENED WITH REPORTS THAT HE HAD GONE INTO A BONN CAMERA STORE WITH A FILM SHOWING SECRET DOCUMENTS FROM NATO HEADQUARTERS IN BELGIUM WHERE HE WORKED AS DEPUTY LOGISTICS CHIEF UNTIL HIS RETIREMENT LAST MONTH.

A DARK ROOM ASSISTANT PROCESSING THE FILM SPOTTED THE "SECRET" STAMP ON THE DOCUMENTS AND ALERTED THE POLICE.

THE FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE ZEITUNG SAID IT RECEIVED CONFIRMATION FROM THE FEDERAL PROSECUTORS OFFICE, WHICH IS LEADING THE INVESTIGATION INTO THE ADMIRAL'S DEATH, THAT A MICROFILM WAS FEATURING IN THEIR INQUIRIES.

(MORE) JF/CM (NOR)

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NOR210 EPE256

1311 :1ST ADD BONN DEATHS:

X X X INQUIRIES.

THE PAPER ALSO SAID LUEDKE'S JOB IN NATO HAD GIVEN HIM ACCESS TO ALLIANCE MATERIAL OF "COSMIC" LEVEL SECRECY, THE HIGHEST SECRECY GRADE IN NATO.

THE FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE SAID IT HAD BEEN SUGGESTED THAT LUEDKE WAS RETIRED FROM HIS NATO POST NOT FOR HEALTH REASONS AS WAS OFFICIALLY STATED BUT BECAUSE HE WAS CONSIDERED A SECURITY RISK.

THE DUESSELDORF NEWSPAPER RHEINISCHE POST NOTED THAT LUEDKE AND GRIMM BOTH WORKED IN LOGISTICS. THE PAPER CHARGED THAT MILITARY AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS WERE PUTTING A SCREEN ROUND THE ISSUE WITH THEIR RAPID DENIALS OF ANY SECURITY ASPECT AND ADDED: "THE QUESTION IS BEING ASKED IN BONN WHETHER A SPY RING HAS NOT IN FACT BEEN DISCOVERED IN THE ARMY."

REUTER (NOR) JF/CM